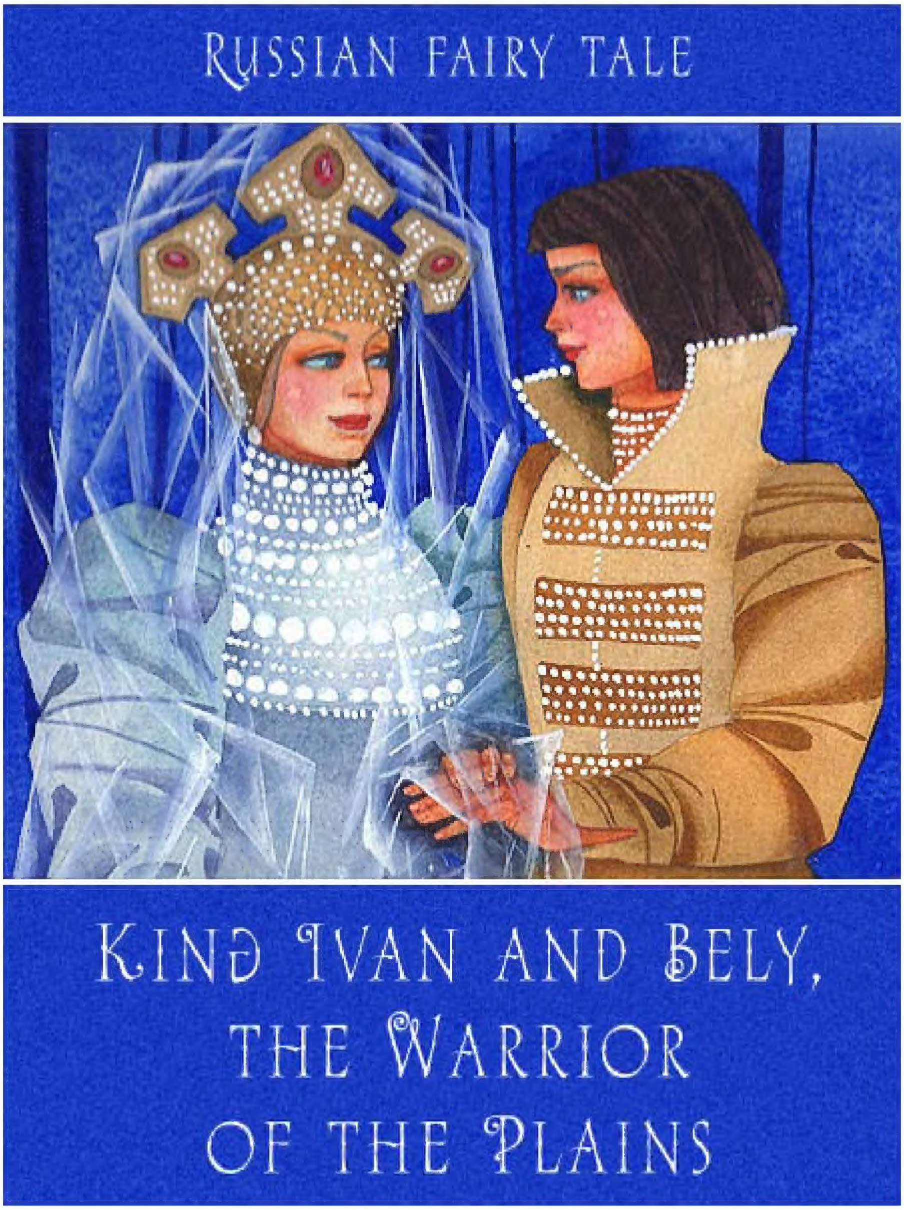


Translated by Irina Zheleznova

Illustrated by T.Silvasci

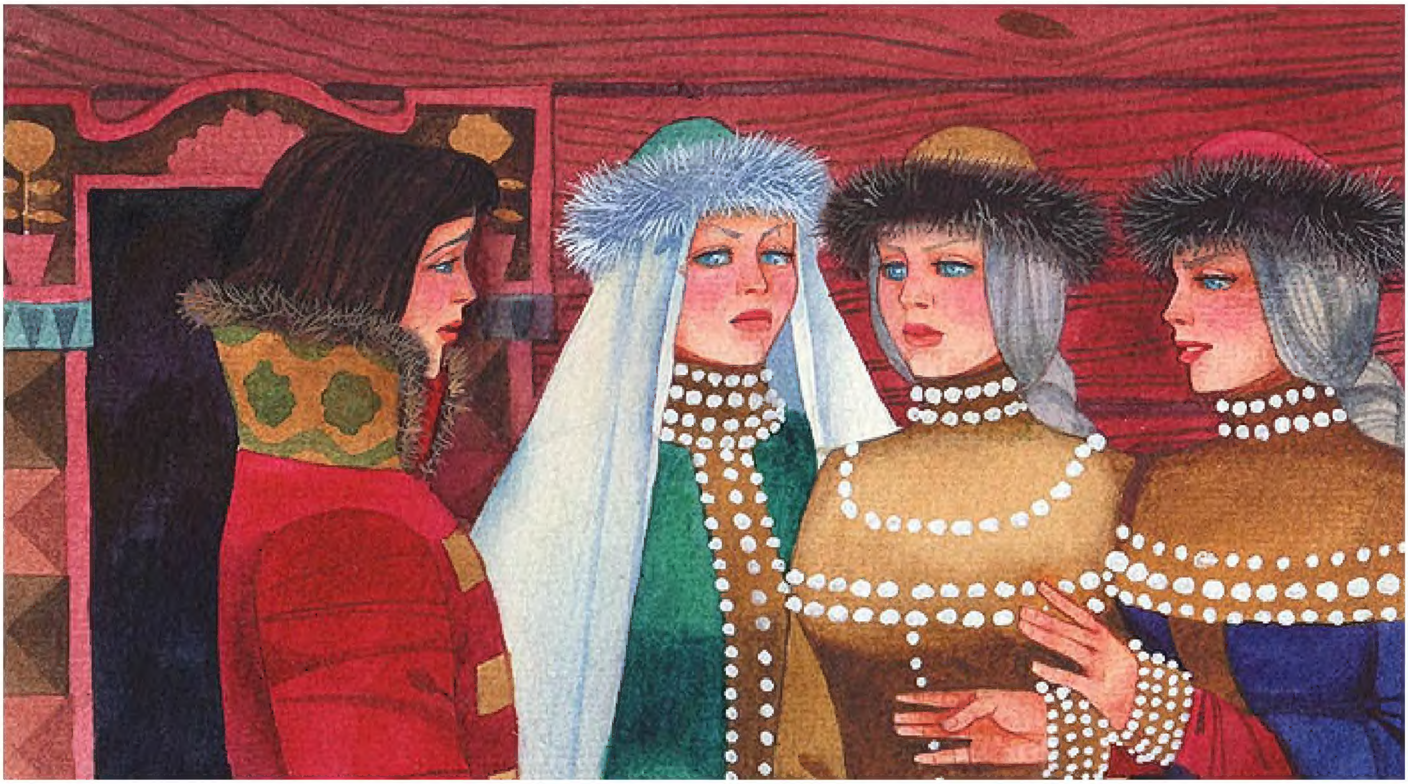
In a certain kingdom, in a certain realm there was once a king who had three daughters and one son, Prince Ivan.

The king grew old and died, and Prince Ivan was crowned king.

As soon as the rulers of the neighbouring realms heard about it they mustered a great host and made war on him.

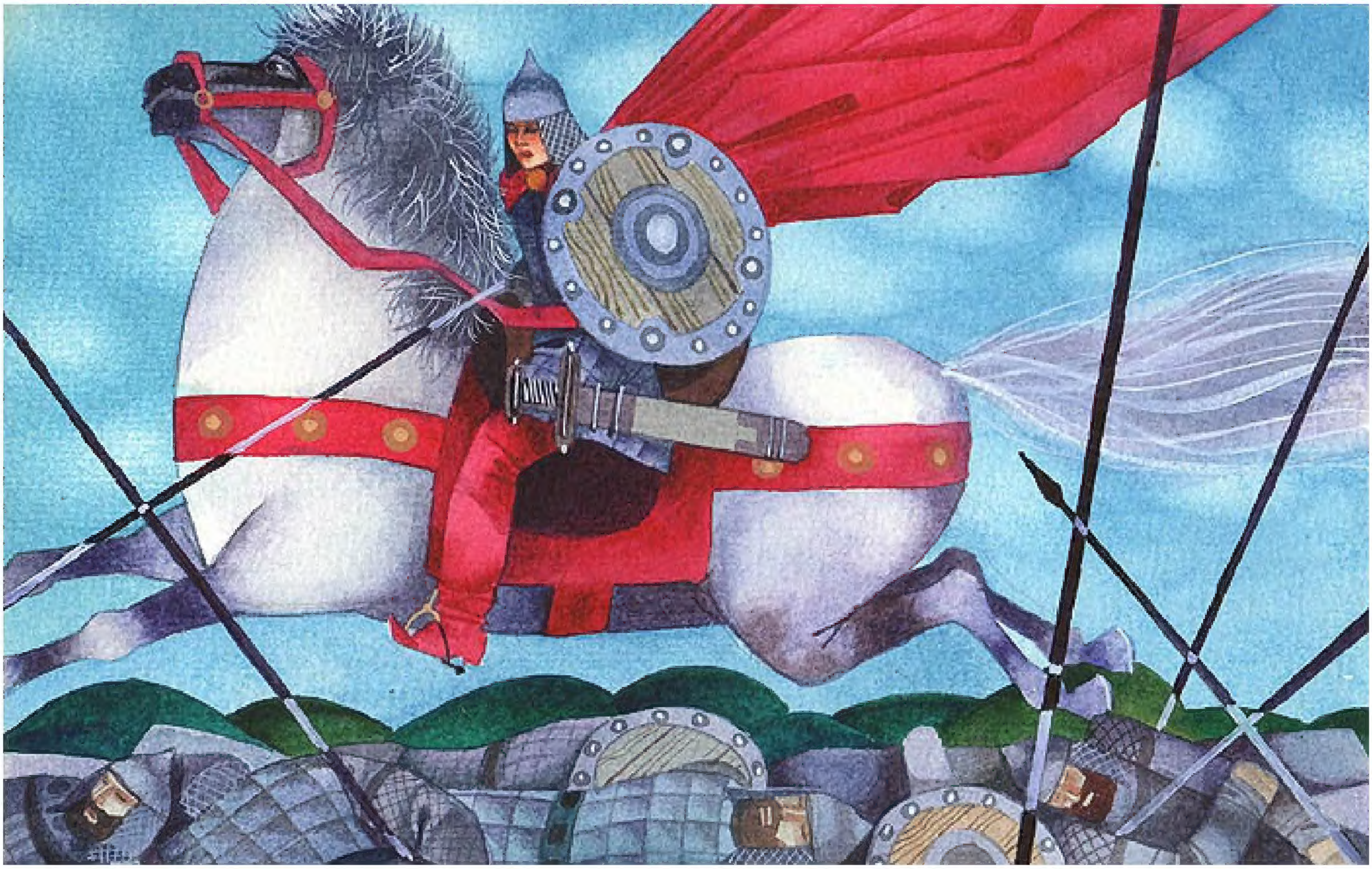
King Ivan did not know what to do. Said he to his sisters: "What am I to do, my dear sisters? The rulers of the neighbouring realms have all sent out their armies against me."

"What sort of warrior are you!" the sisters said. "What have you to fear? Why, Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, has been warring with Baba-Yaga the Leg of Gold for seven years now, and he has never left his horse's back in all that time! How can you take fright without ever having seen any fighting?"



King Ivan at once saddled his trusty steed, donned his armour, took his sword of steel, his great spear and his silken lash, said his prayers and rode out against his foes.

He mowed down many with his sword, and many more were trampled to death by his horse, and when the whole of the enemy host was vanquished, he came back home and fell into a sound sleep.



For three days and three nights he slept and only woke on the fourth day. He came out on to his balcony and glanced at the field of battle, and lo! — Ms foes had mustered a new and greater host against him and had drawn it up to the town's very walls.

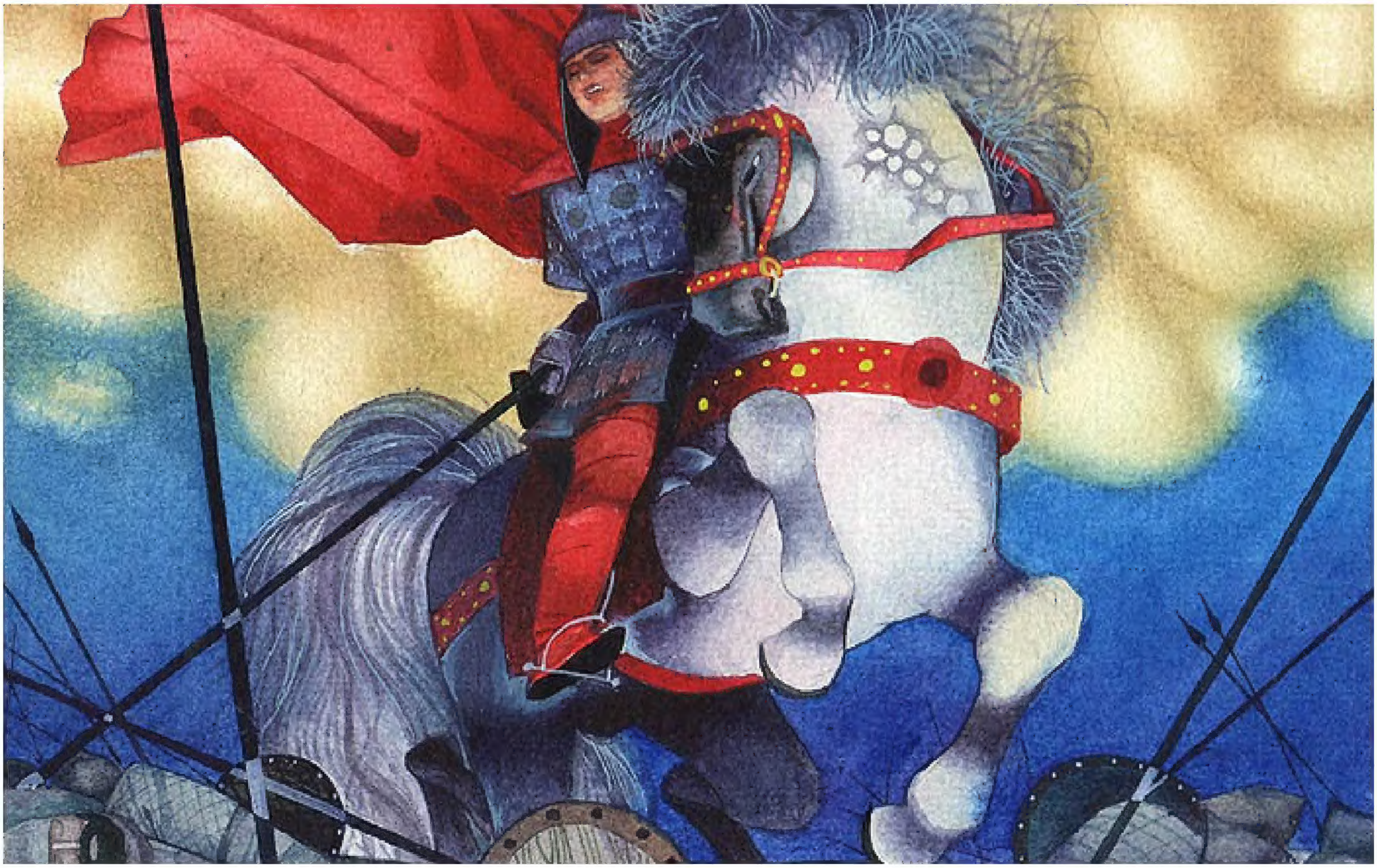
King Ivan was much grieved and went to see his sisters.

"What am I to do, my sisters?" said he. "I have vanquished one host, but now there is another and bigger one at the town walls."

"What sort of warrior are you!" the sisters said. "You fought for a day and a night and then slept without waking for three days and three nights. Why, Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, has been warring with Baba-Yaga the Leg of Gold for seven years, and he has never left his horse's back in all that time!"

King Ivan took these words sorely to heart. He hurried to his stables of white stone, saddled his trusty steed, donned his armour, hung a sword of steel at his side, took a great spear in one hand and a silken lash in the other, said his prayers and rode out against his foes.

Not a falcon was it swooping down on a herd of swans but King Ivan coming at the enemy host. Many were the warriors he mowed down and many more did his horse trample to death.



He vanquished the whole of the enemy host, came back home and fell into a sound sleep. For six days and six nights he slept and only woke on the seventh day. He came out on to his balcony and looked at the field of battle, and lo! — his foes had mustered an even greater host and laid siege to the town.

King Ivan went to see his sisters. "What am I to do, my dear sisters?" said he. "I have vanquished two enemy hosts, but a third and even bigger one is at our walls."

"What sort of warrior are you!" the sisters said. "You fought for a day and a night and slept for six days and six nights. Why, Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, has been warring with Baba-Yaga the Leg of Gold for seven years now, and he has never left his horse's back or had a rest in all that time!"

King Ivan took these words sorely to heart. He hurried to his stables of white stone, saddled his trusty steed, donned his armour, hung a sword of steel at his side, took a great spear in one hand and a silken lash in the other, said his prayers and rode out against his foes.

Not a falcon was it swooping down on a herd of swans but King Ivan coming at the enemy host. Many were the warriors he mowed down and many more did his horse trample to death. He vanquished the whole of the enemy host, came back home and fell into a sound sleep. For nine days and nine nights he slept and only woke on the tenth day.

He called all his nobles and councillors and said to them: "Hear me, my nobles and councillors! I have made up my mind to set off for distant lands and see Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, for myself. And I leave you here to rule the realm in my stead and to judge all men fairly."

He bade his sisters goodbye, mounted his horse and set out on his way.

Whether a short or a long time passed nobody knows, but he came at last to a dark forest where stood a little hut.

An old man lived in the hut, and King Ivan came inside and greeted him. "Good morrow, old man!" said he.

"Good morrow to you, King Ivan!" the old man said. "Whither are you bound?"

"I am seeking Bely, the Warrior of the Plains. Do you know where he is to be found?"

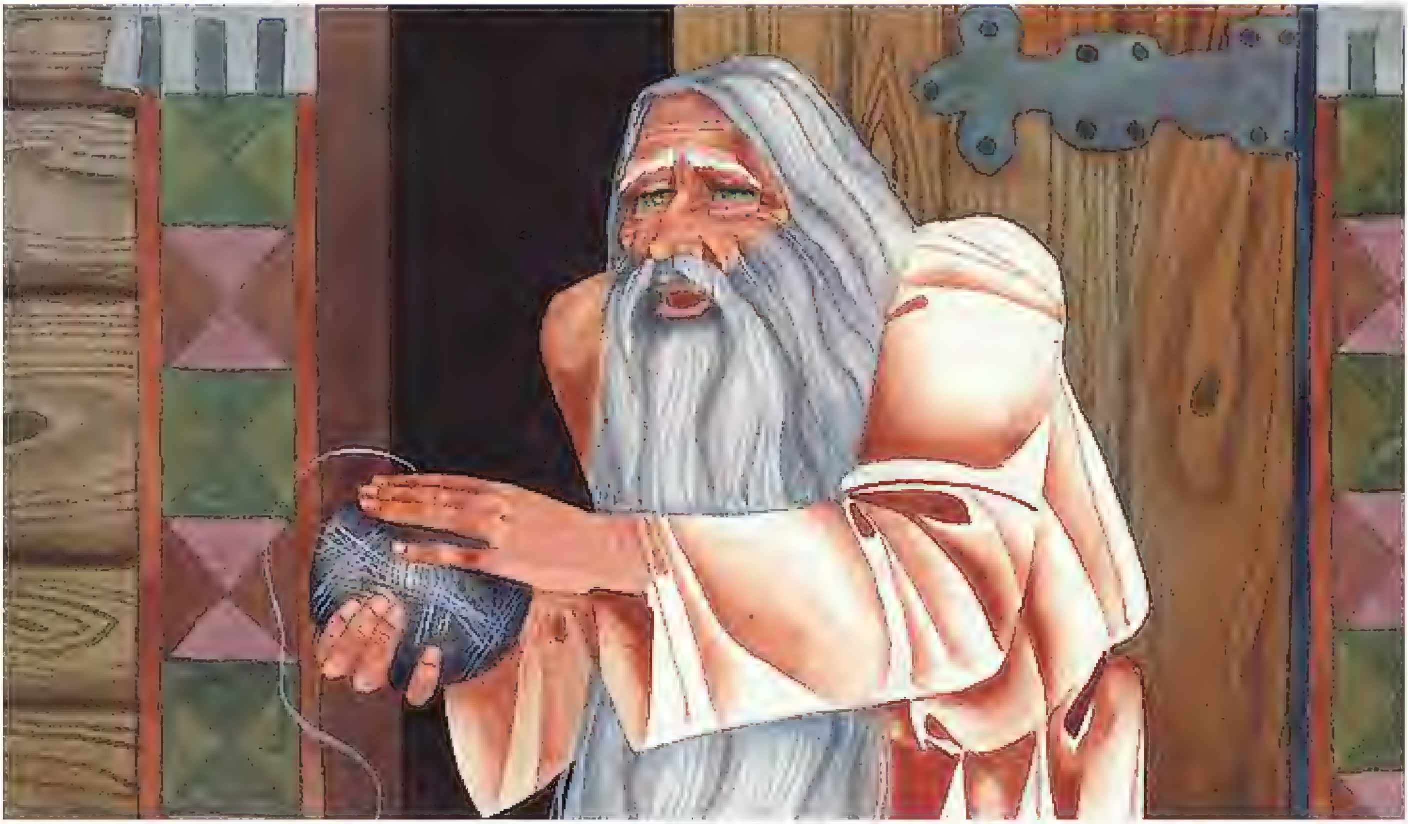
"No, I don't. But wait. I will call my faithful servants and ask them about it."

The old man stepped out on to the porch, put a silver trumpet to his lips and blew, and all of a sudden flocks of birds came flying up to him from all sides. There were countless numbers of them, and they covered the whole of the sky like a great black cloud.

The old man gave a loud whistle and said in a loud voice: "Hear me, I birds, hear me, my faithful servants! Have you ever seen or heard of Bely, the Warrior of the Plains?"

"No! Never have we seen him and never have we heard of him!"

"Well, then, King Ivan," the old man said, "you had better go to see my elder brother and perhaps he can tell you what you want to know. Here, take this ball of thread and throw it before you, and wherever it rolls there must you go."



King Ivan did as he was told. He mounted his horse, sent the ball of thread rolling before him and rode after it.

The forest grew darker and darker, and by and by he rode up to a little hut and came inside. An old man with hair as white as snow sat there, and he bowed to him and said: "Good morrow, old man!"

"Good morrow to you, King Ivan!" the old man said. "Whither are you bound?"

"I am seeking Bely, the Warrior of the Plains. Do you know where he is to be found?"

"Bide here awhile. I will call together my faithful servants and ask them about it."

The old man stepped out on to the porch, put a silver trumpet to his lips and blew, and all of a sudden all of the beasts of the field and the forest came running up to him. The old man gave a loud whistle and he said in a loud voice: "Hear me, I beasts of the field and the forest, hear me, my faithful servants! Have you ever seen or heard of Bely, the Warrior of the Plains?"

"No," said they. "Never have we seen him and never have we heard of him."

"Come, now, look about you! Perhaps not all of you are here?"

The beasts looked about them and saw that the one-eyed she-wolf was not there.

The old man bade them fetch her, and the she-wolf was soon brought before him.

"Tell me, one-eyed she-wolf," said the old man, "have you ever seen Bely, the Warrior of the Plains?"

"I know him well, for I am ever at his side," the she-wolf told him. "He wars with his enemies and kills many, and I eat of their flesh."

"Where is he now?"

"On a high mound in the open field, asleep in his tent. He was fighting Baba-Yaga the Leg of Gold, and after the battle was over, fell into a sound sleep. And he will not wake for twelve days and twelve nights."

"Take King Ivan to him, one-eyed she-wolf!" The one-eyed she-wolf did as she was told. Off she set at a run on her way and King Ivan rode after her.

He rode up to a great mound with a tent on top of it, jumped down from his horse's back and came inside the tent, and there, lying fast asleep, was Bely, the Warrior of the Plains.

"My sisters told me that Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, wars with his enemies without ever taking a rest, but here he is fast asleep and not about to wake," King Ivan said to himself. "So why don't I have a sleep too!" And he stretched himself out by Bely's side.

Now, that same moment a little bird came flying into the tent. It fluttered about near Bely's head and cried: "Come, wake up, Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, and put my brother, King Ivan, to death. For if you don't, he will kill you!"

Hearing it, King Ivan sprang to his feet, caught the bird and tore off its right leg. This done, he threw the bird out of the tent and lay down beside Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, again.

But he was not yet asleep when a second bird came flying in. It fluttered about near Bely's head and cried: "Come, wake up, Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, and put my brother, King Ivan, to death. For if you don't, he will kill you!"

At this King Ivan sprang to his feet, caught the bird, tore off its right wing, threw the bird out of the tent and lay down in the selfsame place again.

By and by a third bird came flying in. It fluttered about near Bely and cried: "Come, wake up, Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, and put my brother, King Ivan, to death. For if you don't, he will kill you!"

At this King Ivan sprang to his feet, caught the bird and tore off its beak. He flung the bird out of the tent and himself lay down and fell fast asleep again.

The twelve days and twelve nights were up, and Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, woke and saw a mighty warrior, one he did not know, lying beside him. He pulled out his sharp sword and was about to kill him, but stopped himself in time. "No," said he to himself. "He found me here asleep and never touched me, so no honour will attach to me if I kill him. A man asleep is like one dead. I had better wake him."

He woke King Ivan and said to him: "Speak and tell me what your name is, whether you are a good man or a wicked one, and what it was that brought you here."

"My name is King Ivan, and I came here to see you and to test your strength."

"You are bold, King Ivan! You came into my tent and lay down beside me without my permission. That is enough for me to want to do away with you!"

"Wait, Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, don't say that you can leap across a ditch before doing it — you may yet stumble. You have two hands, it's true, but then so have I!"

They mounted their trusty steeds, sent them into a gallop and clashed with each other with such force that their spears broke to pieces and their steeds fell to their knees.

King Ivan sent Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, flying from his saddle, and, holding his sword over him, was about to kill him, but Bely said to him in pleading tones: "Have mercy, King Ivan! Spare my life, and I will be as a younger brother to you and will honour and esteem you as I would my own father."

And King Ivan took him by the hand, helped him to his feet and put his arms lovingly around, him.

"I have heard, my brother, that you have been warring with Baba-Yaga the Leg of Gold for seven years. What is the reason for this?"

"It is that Baba-Yaga has a beautiful daughter whom I wish to wed and whom she refuses to give me in marriage."

"What are friends for if they will not help one another!" said King Ivan. "Let us fight Baba-Yaga together!"

They got on their horses and rode out into the open field, and there was Baba-Yaga waiting to meet them with her warrior host.

Not two falcons were these swooping down on a flock of pigeons but two mighty warriors attacking their foes! They mowed down many with their swords and many more were trampled to death by their horses.

Seeing thousands of her warriors lying there dead, Baba-Yaga fled from' the field of battle, but King Ivan saw her and galloped after her.

He had nearly caught her up when she came to a deep pit, and, lifting the heavy slab of iron that covered it, vanished underground.

King Ivan and Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, bought a large number of oxen. They slaughtered and skinned them, cut up the skins into thongs and then plaited them together, making a rope so long that it could reach as far as the netherworld.

Said King Ivan to Bely, the Warrior of the Plains: "Hurry and let me down into the pit, but do not pull up the rope till I tug at it at the other end!"

Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, let him down to the bottom of the pit, and King Ivan looked about him and went to seek Baba-Yaga.

He walked and he walked and he saw a house with a latticed door and some clothes-makers sitting behind it.

"What are you doing there?" he asked them.

"Making a warrior host for Baba-Yaga the Leg of Gold, King Ivan."

"How do you go about it?"

"Here's how. We take a piece of cloth and run it through with a needle, the piece turns into a man, the man mounts his horse, and away he rides to fight Bely, the Warrior of the Plains."

"Ah, well, what you do you do quickly but not well! Come out here and line up before me, and I will show you how to make things properly."

They lined up before him, and King Ivan waved his sword, smote off their heads with one stroke and went on.

He walked and he walked, and he saw a house with a latticed door and some shoemakers sitting behind it.

"What are you doing there?" he asked them.

"Making a warrior host for Baba-Yaga the Leg of Gold."

"How do you go about it?"

"Here's how. We take a piece of leather and pierce it with an awl, the piece turns into a man, the man mounts a horse, and away he rides to fight Bely, the Warrior of the Plains!"

"Ah, well, my good fellows, what you do you do quickly but not well. Come out and line up before me, and I will show you how to make things properly."

They lined up before him, and King Ivan waved his sword, smote off their heads and walked on.

Whether a short or a long time passed nobody knows, but he came to a large and beautiful town. There was a palace there and at the window sat a maid as fair as cannot be told!

She saw the young king, she liked his dark hair and eyes, his sable-black brows and his manly bearing, and she called to him and asked him to come in.

King Ivan did so and she bade him tell her where he was going and what his errand was. "I am seeking Baba-Yaga the Leg of Gold," King Ivan said.

"Well, I am Baba-Yaga's daughter," said the maid. "My mother is in her house sound asleep and will not wake for twelve days and twelve nights." And she led King Ivan to the town gate and showed him the road he was to follow if he wanted to get to her mother's house.

King Ivan found the house and Baba-Yaga in it snoring away on her bed, and he waved his sword and smote off her head.

And as it rolled across the floor it said: "Strike me again, King Ivan!"

"A good warrior need strike but once!" King Ivan replied.

He came back to the palace where lived Baba-Yaga's daughter and sat down beside her at an oaken table spread with a silk-sewn cloth.

He ate and drank his fill and then asked the maid if she had ever heard of a man stronger than he was and a maid fairer than she.

"Ah, King Ivan, I may be fair, but I know of one who is more fair by far!" the maid said. "She is a princess whom a dragon is keeping captive in his palace beyond the thrice-nine lands, in the thrice-ten kingdom."

King Ivan took the maid by the hand and led her to the place where hung the rope made of ox skins. He wound the rope tightly round her and round himself too and tugged at it, signalling Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, to haul them up.

And Bely took hold of the rope and pulled at it till he had both of them safely beside him.

"I am glad to see you, Bely, Warrior of the Plains!" King Ivan said. "Here is a maid who will make you a fine wife, and may you two never grieve and never brood but always be in a cheery mood! And as for me, I am off for the Dragon's kingdom!"

He mounted his trusty steed, bade Bely, the Warrior of the Plains, and his bride goodbye and set off on his way beyond the thrice-nine lands.

Whether a short or a long time passed nobody knows, for a tale is quick in the telling but a deed is slow in the doing, but he came at last to the Dragon's kingdom. He killed the Dragon, freed the lovely princess, married her and brought her back home with him. And the two of them lived happily ever after. They knew no woe, shed never a tear, and prospered the more from year to year.